



**DIS(RE)MEMBERED BODIES:  
CORMAC MCCARTHY'S BORDER  
FICTION**

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Memories are uncertain and the past that was differs little  
from the past that was not.

—Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

The US-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third  
World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab  
forms it hemorrhages again, the life blood of two worlds  
merging to form a third country—a border culture.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Cormac McCarthy's fifth novel, *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985), marked a shift from the Southern settings of his earlier novels to the Southwest settings of his subsequent novels. In contrast to the mostly Appalachian settings of *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), *Child of God* (1973), and *Suttree* (1979), *Blood Meridian* begins in the Tennessee hills but almost immediately has its protagonist, "the kid," light out for the territory, specifically Texas, in 1848. This change of settings from Tennessee to Texas has raised the question of whether McCarthy should still be classified as a Southern writer in the regionalist tradition of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, or whether he has instead become a Western writer à la Louis L'Amour and Tony Hillerman

(Phillips 434–35). Richard B. Woodward has claimed, for instance, that McCarthy is an "heir to the Southern Gothic tradition," though he acknowledges that "there isn't anyone remotely like him in contemporary American literature" (30).<sup>1</sup> Edwin T. Arnold and Diane C. Luce have pointed out, conversely, that starting with McCarthy's "first western" *Blood Meridian*, "almost half of his writing career has been devoted to [. . .] western novels. Many would consider them his best work, although that issue will no doubt continue to be debated" (Introduction vii). What is remarkable about this debate is that it preserves an isolationist view of United States literary history by insisting that McCarthy should be positioned in one or another regionalist tradition, either Southern or Western. In keeping with a longstanding tendency in American literary history to bracket any consideration of Chicano or Latin American literature, much less non-English-language literature, the criticism on Cormac McCarthy has almost obsessively tried to identify his predecessors among canonical American writers—round up the usual suspects—and thereby position him in the Southern or Western camps. Instead, why not view his most recent border fiction in a different light as part of a new American Studies attentive to the diverse cultural, historical, and literary discourses of the Southwest borderlands? Such a view of McCarthy's seemingly unclassifiable work would arguably reposition him within the emergent field of "postnationalist" American studies.<sup>2</sup>

This repositioning would, in turn, help us understand some recent transformations of the Western. After all, *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses* are not so much Westerns as anti-Westerns. In the classic Western, a heroic, self-reliant individual took center stage: the American cowboy was a nostalgic figure from the moment of his first appearance, seemingly untouched by the forces of industrialization and modernization that were then transforming the country.<sup>3</sup> He was, in other words, the antidote to what Theodore Roosevelt called the "over-civilized man" (7). Roosevelt shared the fear of many of his contemporaries that declining birth rates among white upper-class women would eventually lead to race suicide if something was not done to reverse the trend, and he heavily promoted the virtues of the strenuous life on the Western frontier. In his six-volume *The Winning of the West* (1889–96), Roosevelt argued that the "western conquest" was "the crowning and greatest achievement of a series of mighty movements" (qtd. in Brown 31). Roosevelt believed that in "the struggle for existence" (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 42) that prevailed in the West, victory would go to the stronger race, the Anglo-American. He posited a social Darwinist—and Lamarckian—vision where "the strife of races on the frontier produces [. . .] a generalized 'type' or 'race' of 'fighters and breeders'" (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 43). In

Roosevelt's fanciful "race-history" of the nation, a heterogeneous mix of Anglo, German, Dutch, Scots-Irish, and other so-called Teutonic races were "fused into one people" (Brown 31) and this "hybrid super race" was winning the West (Slotkin, *Gunfighter* 44). His version of racial hybridity was, needless to say, highly selective; it ignored the real extent of ethnic diversity in the West, such as the fact that there were many black, Mexican, Indian, and even Chinese cowboys. Nonetheless, Roosevelt's story is entirely consonant with Frederick Jackson Turner's famous frontier thesis, a story whose power, as Bill Brown has suggested, is precisely that of "epic containment—the production of a history of national consolidation so monumental that it diminishes other events" and obscures other realities of the West (31). "The narration of the West," Brown continues, "aestheticizes the genocidal foundation of the nation, turning conquest into a literary enterprise that screens out other violent episodes in the nation's history" (31).

But if that is true of the Western in general, and of dime Westerns in particular, then *Blood Meridian* and McCarthy's border trilogy are very different kinds of Westerns, for they actually make visible those violent episodes that accompanied the fight over land. Moreover, although McCarthy is certainly interested in what constitutes ethical behavior in the violent world of the West during the mid-nineteenth (*Blood Meridian*) and the mid-twentieth centuries (*All the Pretty Horses*), his border novels tend to dispense with the heavy moralism that accompanies most representations of violence in the traditional Western. McCarthy's main characters do not undergo a process of regeneration through violence.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the violence in *Blood Meridian* and to a lesser extent in the border trilogy is presented simply as one of the hard facts of frontier life, but one which needs to be viewed not in the old myth and symbol vein of American studies, but rather in the new paradigm of political domination and power. "In McCarthy's work," writes Dana Phillips, "violence tends to be just that; it is not a sign or symbol of something else" (435).<sup>5</sup> The violence in *Blood Meridian* clearly occurs, however, as one consequence of a larger conflict over land and cultural dominance. So while violence is in some sense a matter of survival and therefore registers in psychological and individualist terms, it takes on added socio-historical significance at a time when the United States engaged in an imperialist campaign to incorporate the entire region of the Southwest. Which is not to say that McCarthy fits comfortably in the revisionist Western history camp either, for as Timothy Parrish and Elizabeth Spiller rightly suggest, his novels represent the violent history of the Southwest "not to indulge in the compensatory pleasures of self-accusation but to remind us of how particularizing ver-

sions of history necessarily deny how we have become to be who we are" (461). *Blood Meridian* poses the question: "What is American history[. . .] but a series of violent cultural transformations, a history of slaughtered selves and strange, incongruous births?" (Parrish and Spiller 463).

The shift from Tennessee to Texas early in *Blood Meridian* corresponds to the author's own migration West, and the novel itself takes up the question of what happens to a Southerner transplanted to the Southwest borderlands. Given McCarthy's extensive historical research on the Southwest region around the time of the Mexican-American War, as well as his apparent mastery of Spanish, *Blood Meridian* is an attempt to reckon with Southwest history and culture.<sup>6</sup> McCarthy's move to the borderlands obviously prompted a still-ongoing project of exploring this region in his fiction. Indeed, McCarthy's border novels constitute an extraordinary engagement with the American Southwest, laying claim to the region in what we might see as an act of late-twentieth-century imaginative imperialism, without the usual pejorative implication of that term. Starting with *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy's recent fiction provides a remarkable portrait of the polyglot borderlands, adding much to our understanding of why this region has always occupied such a prominent place in the US imaginary. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's conception of the National Symbolic as "the *political* space of the nation, which is not merely juridical, territorial (*jus soli*), genetic (*jus sanguinis*), linguistic, or experiential, but some tangled cluster of these" (20), this paper examines McCarthy's representation of the Southwest borderlands in two novels, *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses*. In these novels, the Southwest is seen both as a geographical area and as a mythic place. The realities of the region—its distinctive landscape and cultural diversity—have fed the creation of a whole mythology around it, but this process of myth-making has in some cases occluded the real history of the Southwest. One reason for this is that the myth was easier to swallow than the reality. *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses* may be seen as McCarthy's attempt to contest in his work the official story of Manifest Destiny, according to which American interests took precedence over the claims of indigenous peoples.<sup>7</sup>

In this story, nineteenth-century Americans faced the "problem" of two prior inhabitants of the region: Indians and Mexicans. And the final solution to this problem was conceived in stark terms: either assimilation or removal. "In the present state of our country one of two things seems necessary," Senator Thomas Hart Benton stated in 1844, "either that those sons of the forest should be moralized or exterminated" (qtd. in Rogin 210). These alternatives, in turn, required a powerful rhetoric of justification. Usually justifica-

tion took the form of an argument for inevitable, necessary progress. Equally important for the project of nation-building, though, was that any memory of actual extermination be covered up and eventually forgotten altogether. Prominent theorists of nationalism have pointed out that historical amnesia is endemic to most national narratives. Thus, as Ernest Renan insists, "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for the principle of nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations. [. . .] Unity is always effected by means of brutality" (11). Real violence in the borderlands is followed by the virtual violence of a sort of willed forgetting. What gets forgotten are not only the violent acts themselves but also the bodies left for dead. "From the beginning," writes Susan Scheckel, "settlement and expansion depended" on the "dispossession of the American Indians" (3). The "ghost of the Indian as the subject of genocidal violence," she continues, "has returned inevitably to haunt the nation and its narratives. This haunting marks the limits of that forgetfulness out of which the nation arises" (3).<sup>8</sup>

*Blood Meridian* is a record of forgotten atrocities committed in the name of nationhood. And *All the Pretty Horses* continues the examination of national identity in the borderlands one hundred years later, after a century of US efforts to contain the region's ethnic diversity. These two novels focus attention on the power of the nation to constitute itself and its citizens. But in both novels, the consolidation of national identity risks its dissolution. Amy Kaplan has argued that "only in the release from geographic bounds can the US secure the borders of its identity. And this escape to a distant frontier is nostalgic in that it allows the American man to return home by becoming more fully himself" ("Romancing" 671). McCarthy's main characters leave home as young men and head for Mexico, yet they typically end up right back where they began, still lacking a clear sense of who they are. His characters are peripatetic wanderers who get caught up in the mindless cycle of violence they encounter in the borderlands. While these novels register the costs of human depravity on nearly every blood-stained page, however, McCarthy steadfastly refuses to take sides, much less moralize about the evils of imperialism.<sup>9</sup> He simply wants to remember the forgotten dead. *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses* take on the important task of remembering the dismembered bodies of those who died in the struggle for survival and territory in the US borderlands.

*Blood Meridian* relates the violent history of conflict along the US-Mexico border in the mid-nineteenth century, in the aftermath of

the Mexican-American War (1846–48). The novel begins in 1849, only a year after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo made Texas and most of the Southwest part of the United States, increasing its territory by one-third. *Blood Meridian* makes no mention of the actual treaty, but it does document the violence and dislocation that ensued as a result of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. In particular, the novel represents a violent campaign of near genocide set in motion when a bounty for Indian scalps was issued by Angel Trias, then governor of the Mexican state of Chihuahua, which he deemed necessary to stop Indians from stealing horses inside Mexican territory. Governor Trias's pact was widely reported by newspapers at the time as barbaric. *The New York Daily Tribune*, for example, noted in 1849 that, "The Government of Chihuahua has made a bloody contract with an individual named Chevallie, stipulating to give him a bounty of so much per head for every Indian, dead or alive, whom he may secure. The terms of this atrocious bargain are published in the Mexican papers, which, to their credit be it said, denounce them as inhuman and revolting" (qtd. in Sepich 126). Yet this denunciation of atrocities committed against the Indians came at a time when the US was itself committed to a systematic "removal" of Native Americans from their tribal lands, and the appeal to America's presumed responsibility to civilize barbaric peoples was fraught with contradiction. "The *untransacted* destiny of the American people," wrote William Gilpin in 1846, a year after President Andrew Jackson's death, "is to subdue the continent—to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean [. . .] to regenerate superannuated nations [. . .] to shed a new and resplendent glory upon mankind [. . .] to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and to shed blessings around the world" (qtd. in Rogin 296).

What was being shed in this period, however, was blood, not blessings. *Blood Meridian* demands to be read as a counter-narrative to the overly sanitized rhetoric of Manifest Destiny. For McCarthy's account of bloodshed in the Southwest borderlands gives the lie to such benign rhetoric about the US's expansionist aims. As *Blood Meridian* demonstrates, the border region proved to be a particularly volatile one given the presence of Mexicans, Americans, and Native Americans vying for the same geographical space. Under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexico had just lost nearly fifty percent of its territory, or roughly one million square miles, for which it was remunerated \$15 million by the US (Meier and Ribera 66–67). In his study of the Texas Mexican border ballad "*With His Pistol in His Hand*": *A Border Ballad and its Hero*, Americo Paredes writes, "It was the Treaty of Guadalupe that added the final element to Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point, became a

dividing line. Men were expected to consider their relatives and closest neighbors, the people just across the river, as foreigners in a foreign land" (15). A substantial number of Mexicans found themselves suddenly living in a different country. To be sure, many of them stayed right where they were, albeit with some ambivalence. "Separated from Mexico," writes Gloria Anzaldúa, "the Native Mexican-Texan no longer looked toward Mexico as home. [. . .] The border fence that divides the Mexican people [. . .] left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land" (*Borderlands* 7).<sup>10</sup>

The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was analogous to the dispossession of Indian tribal lands. Indeed, as Michael Rogin observes in his essential study of Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy, "persistent confusion about what was inside America and what outside propelled American expansion [. . .] and the spokesmen for Manifest Destiny applied the lessons of Indian dispossession to justify their territorial designs on Mexico" (309). Two years before the Treaty was signed, for instance, John O'Sullivan declared that the "Mexican race now see, in the fate of the aborigines of the north, their own inevitable destiny. They must amalgamate and be lost, in the superior vigor of the Anglo-Saxon race, or they must inevitably perish" (qtd. in Rogin 309).

At least one problem with redrawing national borders was that Native Americans, who had followed certain patterns of seasonal migration and trade routes for many centuries, tended to ignore the new demarcations of territories.<sup>11</sup> Although American soldiers had recently fought a war with Mexico over the annexation of Texas, it turns out that the reward Trias had promised for scalps was paid out primarily to American bounty hunters, who killed and dismembered Indians by the thousands to collect the money. This violent campaign has been overshadowed by the Mexican-American War, but McCarthy is intent upon digging it up. While these bloody events have been left out of "official" histories of the period, *Blood Meridian* contests the official histories through which, in a clear case of historical amnesia, such violent campaigns carried out in the name of national exceptionalism had been, as it were, disremembered. McCarthy's novel reminds us, and so remembers, that US imperialism in the Southwest is haunted by the specter of dismembered bodies.

Although *Blood Meridian* conforms to revisionist Western history in its critique of the frontier thesis, McCarthy is iconoclastic enough to resist assigning blame for the depredations of US territorial expansion. For one thing, he renders the scene of the borderlands as a complex crucible of ethnicities and ideologies. For another, McCarthy's

work ought to be read alongside other historical and fictional works as part of an important recovery operation in American culture. His border fiction, in other words, is part of a larger discursive effort to historicize the past, providing fictionalized versions of the past that, like most histories, are to some extent conceived as collective or "national" ones. In *Blood Meridian*, for instance, McCarthy analyzes how national identities emerge out of specific conditions and discourses whereby people come to know themselves as citizens, and in creating a novel about America's past, he might be said to construct a national narrative. But I believe that *Blood Meridian* is closer to a postnational narrative in the way Donald Pease defines the term. Whereas national narratives produce "national identities by way of a social symbolic order that systematically separated an abstract, disembodied subject from resistant materialities," he writes, postnational narratives "actively" contest not only the "coherence of the national narrative," but also the "integrity of its universal subject" (3). McCarthy's novel carefully delineates the competing interests of various groups who make claims upon the same geographical space: Anglo, Comanche, Apache, Mexican, Spanish, mestizo, and even African-American. Rather than derive the notion of national identity from some putatively pure, unadulterated bloodline, McCarthy demonstrates that such identities are, despite the most virulent xenophobic racism, fundamentally mixed. "You cant be all Mexican," one character asserts, "It's like being all mongrel" (159). *Blood Meridian* examines the formation of a decidedly *mestizo* culture from the panoply of cultural practices, ethnicities, and material bodies inhabiting the border region.

The protagonist of *Blood Meridian* is a teenager known to the reader only as "the kid." His lack of a surname signals a certain rootlessness, and indeed the kid is cut off from his family from the start. When he leaves his father and siblings in Tennessee for the West at the beginning of the book (his mother died giving birth to him), the first thing he comes across is a "parricide in a crossroads hamlet" (4). It is as if the kid's identification with the parricide has cut him off from any connection with his family. "Only now," the narrator observes, "is the child finally divested of all that he has been. His origins are become as remote as his destiny" (5). Devoid of name and family, the kid appears as a kind of alien as well: "he keeps from off the king's road for fear of citizenry" (15). He finds himself suddenly bereft of all the conventional markers of identity, including a sense of belonging to a national citizenry. The kid is reminiscent of Huck Finn lighting out for the territory, and he also recalls Twain's Connecticut Yankee, or even Melville's Ishmael. In making such comparisons, however, I am falling into the conventional gene-



alogy of American literature from the Puritans to the present. In what follows, I want to focus instead on the kid's uncanny embodiment of a more diverse, proto-multicultural population on the frontier, where he finds himself roaming around with a bunch of misfits intent upon killing everyone in their path: "He can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for mindless violence. All history present in that visage, the child the father of the man" (3). The plot follows the kid in his adventures as he participates, unselfconsciously, in Westward expansion. "In essence," writes Wegner, "the kid actively participates in American expansion West and South" (74). Yet McCarthy insists on the largely apolitical character of his motivations, the unthinking way in which he abandons himself to his own worst impulses.

What is striking about *Blood Meridian* from a postnationalist perspective is how national identities persist even as they are subtly transformed amidst the highly mixed, heterogeneous population of the borderlands. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has noted that borders are "sites where identities and cultures intersect" (149), and McCarthy makes clear how the intersection of identities and cultures, not just from each side of the arbitrary dividing line but from all manner of indigenous or national origins, complicates any simplistic notions of affiliation and allegiance. The first town the kid visits when he arrives in Texas, for instance, is inhabited by "immigrants and Texans and Mexicans," not to mention "slaves and Lipan indians and deputations of Karankawas tall and austere, their faces dyed blue and their hands locked about the shafts of their sixfoot spears, all but naked savages who with their painted skins and their whispered taste for human flesh seemed outrageous presences even in that fabled company" (38). Led by Captain White, the motley group of renegades that the kid has joined crosses the US/Mexico border, such as it was at the time. The blurring of borders and identities, however, obtains only on the ground. In the lofty realm of politics, borders must be kept distinct. "Right now they are forming in Washington a commission to come out here and draw up the boundary lines between our country and Mexico," Captain White informs the kid. "I don't think there's any question that ultimately Sonora will become a United States territory [. . .] our citizens will be protected at last from the notorious pack of cutthroats presently infesting the routes which they are obliged to travel" (34). The supposed inevitability of Westward expansion ("the routes which they are obliged to travel") meant that national boundaries must be forged and maintained at all costs, by violent means if necessary. Captain White voices the racist xenophobia that belies the sanitized rhetoric of Manifest Destiny. "What we are dealing with is a race of degenerates," he

sneers. "A mongrel race, little better than niggers. There is no government in Mexico. Hell, there's no God in Mexico. We are dealing with people who cannot govern themselves" (34).<sup>12</sup> There is no mistaking the blatant racism of the aptly named Captain White, yet I believe McCarthy wants to caution us against a simple indictment of white racism for the violence represented in the novel, for it is perpetrated indiscriminately by everyone, regardless of ideology. Indeed, although White expresses here the white man's burden in no uncertain terms, elsewhere ideology seems to have nothing to do with the matter.

In *Blood Meridain*, mindless violence prevailed in the field, and the problem was that the violent acts themselves would soon be forgotten. In this sense, at least, the novel demonstrates how the territorial designs of the US entailed not only dismembering bodies but erasing any record of that dismemberment. In one passage, McCarthy records the senseless massacre of a tribe of peaceful Indians:

When the first dogs barked Blanton roweled his horse forward and they came out of the trees and across the dry scrub with the long necks of the horses leaning out of the dust avid as hounds and the riders quirting them on into the sun where the shapes of the women rising up from their tasks stood flat and rigid in silhouette for a moment before they quite believe in the reality of that dusty pandemoniac pounding down upon them. They stood dumb, barefoot, clad in the unbleached cotton of the country. They clutched cooking ladles, naked children. At the first fire a dozen of them crumpled and fell.

The others had begun to run old people flinging up their hands, children tottering and blinking in the pistolfire. A few young men ran out with drawn bows and were shot down and then the riders were all through the village trampling down the grass wickiups and bludgeoning the shrieking householders. (174)

The tone of this passage is flat; moreover, McCarthy appears neither to condone nor condemn the horrific action he describes, refusing to editorialize or explain away the violence. The political implications of McCarthy's vision emerge in the way he records a forgotten past, in particular the forgotten corpses that litter the landscape from such unspeakably violent battles. After this massacre, the narrator remarks: "In the days to come the frail black rebus of blood in those sands would crack and break and drift away so that in the circuit of a few suns all trace of the destruction of these people would be erased.

The desert wind would salt their ruins and there would be nothing, no ghost nor scribe, to tell any pilgrim in his passing how it was that people had lived in this place and in this place died" (174). Remembering the dead becomes, then, a way of coming to terms with how the West was won. And this act of remembering in turn provides a somewhat new perspective on both the complexity of Western history and the diversity of the people involved in making that history.

In *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy picks up his story of the borderlands one hundred years later. Two Texas teenagers, John Grady Cole and Lacey Rawlins, set out on horseback for the border. Early on in their journey, they encounter a "Mexican" whom they assume to be familiar with "that country down there." Not so: "The Mexican shook his head and spat. I never been to Mexico in my life" (34). The two phrases in juxtaposition point to a discrepancy between national identity ("Mexican") and actual national space ("Mexico"). There is, as we have seen, historical precedent for such a discrepancy. After the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, a substantial number of Mexican citizens suddenly found themselves living in a different country—annexed to the United States. The impulse to identify themselves and be identified as Mexicans, even though many became citizens of the US, persists well into the present. As Pauline Kibbe of the Texas Good Neighbor Commission observed in 1946, nearly a hundred years after the Treaty itself and roughly the same time period in which McCarthy's novel is set, "Mexican Americans continue to be considered Mexican though they were born here and know no other country" (qtd. in Meier and Ribera 6). By 1950, these *tejanos*, or Texans of Mexican descent, seemed indistinguishable from the huge numbers of immigrants arriving from the South—by some estimates as many as 4 million in the ten years between 1945 and 1955. Nativist fears about this massive influx of Mexicans culminated in the so-called "Operation Wetback" in 1954, a deportation drive that ultimately sent back one million immigrants and prompted US Attorney General Brownell to assure Americans afterwards that "the wetback problem no longer exists" (qtd. in Meier and Ribera 190). His confidence was misplaced, of course, since today about one million Mexican "undocumented," as the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) designates them, are apprehended annually. Notwithstanding the many stereotypes perpetuated in the mass media, there remain far more US citizens of Mexican descent—roughly 14 million—than Mexican citizens living in the US—about 4 million—whatever their legal status (Smorkaloff 96). Like *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy's Border Trilogy investigates what Berlant terms a National Symbolic, "the order of discursive practices whose reign within a national space produces, and also refers to, the 'law' in which the

accident of birth within a geographical/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively-held history. [. . . T]hrough the National Symbolic the historical nation aspires to achieve the inevitability of the status of natural law, a birthright" (20).

Part of McCarthy's now-completed Border Trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses* follows its characters from San Angelo to San Antonio, across the US/Mexico border to the states of Coahuila and Zacatecas before finally bringing them back again to Southwest Texas. In one sense, the novel inverts the direction of actual historical migration. *All the Pretty Horses* opens in September 1949 on the funeral of John Grady's maternal grandfather. But the boy who attends his grandfather's funeral in the novel's opening scene ultimately goes to another funeral in its penultimate one, this time for a Mexican-American woman who has worked on his family's farm for over fifty years, has taught him to speak Spanish, and is a kind of surrogate mother to him; John Grady affectionately refers to her as Abuela—grandmother. Symbolically, the symmetry of the two funerals suggests that John Grady is *mestizo*, a descendant of Anglo and Mexican blood lines. Although only sixteen at the time, he feels "like a man come to the end of something" (5). Yet his father draws a more curious analogy: "The last thing his father said was that the country will never be the same. [. . .] We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We don't know what's goin to show up here come daylight. We don't even know what color they'll be" (25–26). The father's statement oddly combines sensitivity to the imminent displacement of Native Americans with nativist sentiments of the kind that had motivated "Operation Wetback." Mr. Cole also makes an implausible genealogical link to the Indians. Yet John Grady himself hears these indigenous peoples while riding an "old Comanche road" on the eve of the funeral:

At the hour he'd always choose when the shadows were long and the ancient road was shaped before him in the rose and canted light like a dream of the past where the painted ponies and the riders of that lost nation came down out of the north [. . .] you could hear [. . .] the low chant of their traveling song which the riders sang as they rode, nation and ghost of nation passing in a soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives. (5)<sup>13</sup>

This passage is elegiac as well as paratactic. According to the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, parataxis is first "a stylistic term referring to a relative paucity of linking terms between

juxtaposed clauses or sentences." Another connotation of parataxis, however, is what *Webster's* somewhat cryptically calls a "parataxic mode of experience." Anyone who has read *All the Pretty Horses* will no doubt recognize parataxis in the first sense as the most salient feature of McCarthy's prose. But parataxis in the second, more ambiguous sense is also a crucial aspect of the text, especially in its interrogation of national identities and the social construction of those identities on either side of the border. The passage already gives us a hint of the way McCarthy's paratactic prose registers "nationality" narratively, so to speak, since the Native-American "nation" invoked here was one rooted in the local geographical terrain, whereas the abstract socio-political nationhood of modern states is one whose actual borders are maintained only by means of strict surveillance. "In the modern conception," Benedict Anderson explains, "state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory" (19). By contrast, for Indian nations customs and practices derived from the land itself rather than the other way around; in this "older imagining," then, "borders were porous and indistinct" (Anderson 19). It was a far more local conception of nation and national identity than the modern one, epitomized by a 2,000 mile-long line drawn in the Southwest desert. When John Grady and Rawlins plan to cross the border into Mexico, they first consult a map on which there are "roads and rivers and towns on the American side of the map as far South as the Rio Grande and beyond that all was white"; Rawlins takes one look at the map and exclaims, "There aint shit down there" (34).

While the border imposes a hierarchical, subordinate relationship between the two sides, McCarthy substitutes a paratactic relationship. That is, he recognizes both sides of the resulting juxtapositions—Mexico and the US, American and Mexican—as a mutually constitutive pair.<sup>14</sup> I am mostly concerned with two juxtapositions: those between national identities—in this case, "Mexican" and "American"—and those between nation states themselves.<sup>15</sup> In *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy brings his strikingly paratactic prose style to bear on the question of whether national identities should be considered permanent, pseudo-biological determinants of selfhood, grounded as they often are in notions of ethnicity. Even the novel's plot may be seen as paratactic, or more precisely picaresque. As Denis Donoghue has pointed out, the novel is "rampant with incidents, but each of the incidents is placed at the same distance from the reader. [. . . They] are not discriminated, adjudicated for significance, or pointed toward a climax, a disclosure, or a resolution" (5). Which is to say they are linked paratactically, with each scene followed by another. The episodic nature of the novel is suggestive in light of the fact that

Anderson has associated a picaresque tradition with the rise of nationalism itself; picaresque novels, along with the emergence of print culture, helped to produce imagined communities.<sup>16</sup>

McCarthy's novel contests any simple conception of how national identities are formed by showing that border regions are inhabited by radically "*transcultured subjects*" (Saldívar 283). Given the near indeterminacy of national identities around the borderlands, McCarthy implicitly asks, what finally qualifies anyone as American or indeed any other nationality? When Cole and Rawlins run into young Jimmy Blevins, who at first glance strikes them as "just a deadhead" (44), they ask him why he should be allowed to tag along. "Cause I'm an American," Blevins replies, an ingenious answer since this is pretty much the only thing about him they can be sure of. To make matters worse, Blevins claims that the horse he's riding actually belongs to him—hence their incredulity about everything else. Even his name has probably been made up, and their suspicion on that score is confirmed when, upon returning to Texas at the end of the novel, John Grady meets a radio evangelist whose name also happens to be Jimmy Blevins—apparently the boy had adopted an alias after hearing the preacher on the air.<sup>17</sup>

Two key episodes—the hacienda and the prison—exemplify the process I am outlining. In the interior of Mexico, Cole and Rawlins find employment as stable boys at the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción [Hacienda of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception]. The name itself alerts us to the Spanish Catholic heritage of many wealthy landowners, but the immaculate conception signaled by the name is belied by what actually goes on at the ranch, whose owner Don Hector Rocha y Villareal crossbreeds Spanish stock horses with the bloodline of Steeldust, a celebrated Texas quarter horse that had been foaled in Paris, Kentucky. While Señor Rocha is cross-breeding his horses, however, no such cross-breeding will be tolerated when it comes to his daughter Alejandra. In one blatantly symbolic scene, John Grady rides a magnificent white stallion bareback while Alejandra herself rides a black Arabian. The consummation of the relationship is foreshadowed when she insists on exchanging horses (Donoghue 9). The American is warned to stay away from her by the girl's grand-aunt, godmother, and legal guardian, the formidable Dueña Alfonso. "This is another country," she tells him. "Here a woman's reputation is all she has" (136). The Don too opposes their courtship on similarly nationalistic grounds, if not with the same gender specificity: "One country is not another country. Mexico is not Europe. But it is a complicated business" (145).

Alfonso further justifies her concern for the girl's future by relating to John Grady the story of her past. "In my own life," Alfonso

begins, "I saw [. . .] the ruin of a nation. I will tell you how Mexico was" (231). Her seemingly interminable story turns out to involve the dramatic political events of the Mexican Revolution: Alfonsa had been "changed forever" (232), she says, when she fell in love at an early age with Gustavo Madero, brother of fellow revolutionary, future president, and eventual martyr Francisco I. Madero. "The rest of the story is not so difficult to imagine since the facts are known" (236), says Alfonsa, and indeed McCarthy relies on the historical record for his fictionalization of events leading up to Francisco's successful coup over dictator Porfirio Díaz, followed by his execution at the hands of General Huerta, who then succeeded him as Mexico's president.<sup>18</sup> Alfonsa ends her narrative with this conclusion about the failure of the Revolution: "I think they did not understand Mexico. Francisco was the most deluded of all. He was never suited to be president of Mexico. He was hardly even suited to be Mexican" (238). Here at the center of the novel, we find a story of the nation's fight for justice or sovereignty. At the origin of the nation, one typically finds a story of that nation's origin, and this narrative more often than not involves a justifiable revolution against some external or internal enemy.

The second major episode in *All the Pretty Horses* takes place inside a Mexican prison, "where in an egalitarian absolute every man was judged by a single standard and that was his readiness to kill" (182). Cole and Rawlins don't fare so well in this ruthless environment, but then neither do most of the inmates. As newcomers, and as Americans, they do well merely to stay alive. "Life is not so good here for Americans," a man named Perez informs them, "They don't like it so much" (187). Under the circumstances, we are hardly surprised when John Grady is challenged to a duel—the stakes of which are either to kill or be killed—and McCarthy relates the ensuing fight in excruciating detail. John Grady prevails, however, and then goes on to reunite with Alejandra at La Purisma.

To some extent, *All the Pretty Horses* conforms to an imperialist Western literary tradition of adventure novels, which typically combine violent episodes (such as the one at the prison) with romantic interludes (such as the ones at La Purisma). As Kaplan argues, "Masculinity freed of national boundaries at first glance appears a purely corporeal identity materialized through the immersion in primal violence. The subject position of the heroes in these novels, however, lies at the conjunction of violent demonstrations of brute strength and a chivalric dedication to women" (671). But McCarthy's protagonist doesn't survive this contest without killing his adversary, the latter dying in a sort of death embrace where the victim is virtually indistinguishable from the victor, and neither does he get the girl in

the end for his trouble. Having barely escaped death, John Grady is pretty beat up himself: "He ran his tongue into the corner of his mouth and tasted blood. He knew his face had been cut but he didnt know how bad. [. . .] It occurred to him that he was going to die in this place" (200). Elaine Scarry contends that "intense pain" (35) has the effect of obliterating "a person's self and world" (12). "The sentient fact of physical pain," Scarry writes, "is world-destroying" (29). John Grady emerges from this near-death experience as a man without a clear sense of who he is—needless to say, national identity could not be further from his mind. *All the Pretty Horses* therefore departs from the convention of a citizen-hero whose national identity is both confirmed and strengthened by his exploits abroad. McCarthy's cowboy hero, in contrast, is unsure where he comes from and wanders aimlessly for the rest of the book, even disavowing his citizenship at one point.

Rawlins has not had *his* loyalty to the United States likewise shaken, however, and upon his release from prison he "decides he's had enough of Mexico" (Donoghue 9) and hightails it back to Texas. In a key scene that highlights the complications of national identity in the borderlands, Rawlins worries about whether his identity may have been, as it were, diluted:

They put Mexican blood in me, he said. [. . .]  
So.  
So what does that mean? said Rawlins.  
Mean about what?  
Well does it mean I'm part Mexican?  
John Grady drew on the cigarette and leaned back and  
blew the smoke into the air. Part Mexican? he said.  
Yeah.  
How much did they put?  
They said it was over a litre.  
How much over a litre?  
I dont know.  
Well a litre would make you almost a halfbreed.  
Rawlins looked at him. It dont, does it? he said.  
No. Hell, it dont mean nothin. Blood's blood. It dont know  
where it come from. (210–11)

Rawlins's conviction that national identity runs so deep as to course through his very veins reveals the pseudo-biological fiction that often accompanies notions of ethnic and national identities. John Grady opposes that fiction by pointing out that blood is the same for everyone everywhere, but the braceros back at the Purisma ranch share Rawlins's concern; they believe "that it was no accident of circum-



stance that a man be born in a certain country and not some other, that the weathers and seasons that form a land form also the inner fortunes of men in their generations and are passed on to their children and are not so easily come by otherwise" (226). These mystical claims call attention to what anthropologists call local knowledge: a network of social practices specific to a culture or region and handed down for generations—the kind of knowledge acquired through one's immersion in a set of communal activities, customs, rites. Local knowledge attests to the fact that we are all social beings, that apart from the social there can be no ontology of the subject, which is to say that the self could not exist as such. National identity might seem at first to be one aspect of local knowledge, as the Mexican cowboys imply, yet these identities are finally much less essential to selfhood, much more dependent on ideology. That is why national narratives are needed to help confer, as if ineluctably, our citizenship rights. "Modern citizens are born in nations and are taught to perceive the nation as an intimate quality of identity," Berlant observes, "as intimate and inevitable as biologically-rooted affiliations through gender or the family. National subjects are taught to value certain abstract signs and stories as part of their intrinsic relation to themselves, to all 'citizens,' and to the national terrain: there is said to be a common national 'character'" (20–21).<sup>19</sup>

Seen in this light, it is no small coincidence that John Grady finally gets back across the border, near Langtry, Texas, on Thanksgiving Day, a national holiday commemorating one of our founding myths, the puritan origins of the American self. Looking like "some apparition out of the vanished past" (287), however, John Grady approaches two men working on a broken-down pickup truck and asks them what day it is. "It's Thursday, the first one said. [. . .] It's Thanksgiving day, the other man said" (287). Yet John Grady is in no frame of mind to give thanks; indeed, he feels a strange sense of alienation from America, as befits someone riding a horse in a se-rape who doesn't even know it's Thanksgiving: "He rode the border country for weeks" (287), wandering aimlessly, it seems, with no purpose other than to keep moving. Finally he goes to visit his old buddy Lacey Rawlins, and there he confesses his doubts about whether he still belongs in America after leaving the love of his life—not to mention his innocence—back in Mexico. Their conversation turns to the question of national belonging. "This is still [a] good country," Rawlins assures him.

Yeah. I know it is. But it aint my country. [. . .]

Where is your country? he said.

I dont know, said John Grady. I dont know where it is. I dont know what happens to country. (299)

Two US Supreme Court cases in 1958 provide an ironic comment on John Grady's disavowal of national identity at the end of the book, at roughly the same historical moment. Both cases entail a similar renunciation or revocation of citizenship. In the first, *Trop v. Dulles*, the Court ruled that the US military could not divest the defendant of his national citizenship on the grounds that he had deserted during wartime. Chief Justice Warren wrote for the majority that such an exercise of military power was unconstitutional because de-nationalization is, in effect, "a cruel and unusual punishment" (101) and thus violates the Eighth Amendment. "There may be involved no physical mistreatment, no primitive torture," Warren argued:

There is instead the total destruction of the individual's status in organized society. It is a form of punishment more primitive than torture, for it destroys for the individual the political existence that was centuries in development. The punishment strips the citizen of his status in the national and international political community. His very existence is at the sufferance of the country in which he happens to find himself. (101)

As the second 1958 court case makes clear, however, the sanctity of citizenship extended only to certain individuals and not to others. In *Perez v. Brownell*, the Supreme Court did *not* reverse an earlier decision that had revoked the defendant's US citizenship. In this case, US Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr. argued that although Perez was born in Texas, he had lived with his family in Mexico for several decades and even voted in a political election there, thus forfeiting his American citizenship in "a dilution of undivided allegiance sufficient to show voluntary abandonment of citizenship" (75). Whereas in the *Trop* case the court decided in favor of the defendant, here it denied citizenship to Perez in order to "put an end to dual citizenship" (55). While national identity in *Trop* was upheld as "man's basic right" (64), national identities in *Perez* were not. One suspects that the different ethnicities of the two defendants had something to do with the outcome of each case, and it is perhaps not surprising to learn that the prosecutor for *Perez* was the same Attorney General who had instigated the so-called "Operation Wetback" in 1954.

If I started my analysis of *All the Pretty Horses* with the contradiction that arose from calling someone "Mexican" who had never been to Mexico, my final anecdote involves an "American" who was stripped of his citizenship because he had been to Mexico; in either case, an individual who appears to be Mexican is considered Mexican whether he is from Mexico or not. Ethnicity turns out to be roughly

coterminous with national identity, since it determines that identity from the outset. K. Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., have elaborated on this tendency to conflate ethnic and national identities. "In the United States," according to Appiah and Gates,

ethnic and racial identities have been understood always in terms of differences both internal and external to the American nation. But the internal contrasts have often been figured in terms of outside contrasts, because it has always been possible (by occluding the Native American presence) to see America as a 'nation of immigrants,' whose separateness could be mapped onto their places of origin. [. . .] Ethnic and national identities operate in the lives of individuals by connecting them with some people, dividing them from others. (627)

These divisive and frequently harmful oppositions continue to dominate public discourse about national identities, and they pervade virtually all social contracts to varying degrees. However powerfully we are interpellated as subjects *and* citizens, discriminations made among different groups are not inevitable, and American literary history needs to develop a more capacious, open-ended approach to the literatures and peoples of North America.<sup>20</sup> In their introduction to *Subjects and Citizens* (1995), Michael Moon and Cathy Davidson contend that "issues of race and gender challenge nationalist paradigms and realign the borders of both the nation and the field of American literary history" (1). Insofar as McCarthy's border fiction brings into focus the contested field on which national identities are wrought, it can be described as post-national, not because we are ready to, as Rowe puts it, "[throw] all nationalisms into the trash can of history" (2), but rather because we need to "re-imagine the nation as a site within many 'cognitive maps' in which the nation-state is not congruent with cultural identity" (Saldívar xiii). While national identity is still at present an enabling condition for political agency, many other aspects of identity could take precedence over nationality, with no corresponding diminishment of civic life. I have in mind the many local affiliations, friendships, and commitments that connect us in so many ways to those who are, if not exactly like us, at least similar enough to enter into the kinds of social relationships that make our lives meaningful.<sup>21</sup>

In a collection of essays titled *Reading the West* (1996), Michael Kowalewski writes that "the critical acclaim and bestseller status of Cormac McCarthy's western work [. . .] suggest a continuing popular fascination with western characters and landscapes" (4). But rather than see McCarthy's border fiction as one more incarnation of the

Western, we need to consider his work in the context of a "newly conceived literary history that emphasizes multilingual, hybridized tropes and forms of intercultural communication" (Kowalewski 10).<sup>22</sup> McCarthy represents the US/Mexico border as a "contact zone" in the sense that Mary Louise Pratt has defined the term, a place "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4), or rather what José David Saldívar prefers to call a *transfrontera* contact zone, "the Janus-faced border line in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves do negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics" (13–14). In both his bilingualism and his remarkable engagement with Southwest culture and history, McCarthy models a new approach to representing the borderlands as a *transfrontera* contact zone, an approach we should not therefore associate only with American ethnic writers. In this sense, *Blood Meridian* and the Border Trilogy can help us create "a broad genealogy in which a range of border writings operate across both nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century contexts" (Saldívar xiii). Similarly, McCarthy provides an opportunity for us to go beyond the outmoded paradigm that posited a self-contained American literary history from Puritans to the present. There is no going back to the older conception of national literatures as self-contained canons, because a major paradigm shift has occurred, and it no longer seems plausible, or desirable, to delimit the burgeoning field of US literature by sealing off its borders.

## Notes

1. In retrospect, it is easy to see why McCarthy was initially associated so closely with Faulkner. His first novel *The Orchard Keeper* was acquired by Albert Erskine, Faulkner's longtime editor at Random House, only three years after Faulkner's death in 1962, and was published in May 1965. No wonder, then, that Orville Prescott's review of the novel in *The New York Times* was entitled, "Still Another Disciple of William Faulkner" (Arnold and Luce, *Perspectives* 1–2).
2. In two recent works, Rowe elaborates on both the problems and possibilities of a new post-nationalist American studies. In a co-authored introduction to *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (2000), Rowe et al. acknowledge that "invocations of the post-national by US intellectuals" run the risk of disavowing the "global reach of US media and military might" and of ignoring the uses to which various nationalisms are still put (2). "Despite the paradoxes and dangers of a post-nationalist approach to American studies, however," the au-

- thors advocate such an approach, because it is finally "less insular and parochial, and more internationalist and comparative" (2).
3. For a discussion of the anachronistic, nostalgic figure of the American cowboy, see McMurtry.
  4. The classic account of moral redemption in the Western is, of course, Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (1973). See also his more recent *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992).
  5. Pitts concurs: "The violence in the novel appears to speak for itself; it simply happens" (20). He goes on to suggest that violence in McCarthy "seems to happen in an isolated place and moment in the prehistory of the American frontier before the writing of the frontier myth and its incorporation into our cultural memory" (21). I want to argue, rather, that violence in McCarthy's novels at once represents and participates in the creation of cultural memory.
  6. Sepich and Wegner detail McCarthy's various borrowings and revisions of historical sources. "McCarthy's southwestern works grow less historically and geographically specific," Wegner claims. "History, an important, viable character in *Blood Meridian*, becomes an influence—a secondary, subtle motivator—in the trilogy, where it is the human responses to that historical influence that take center stage" (76). Where Wegner sees McCarthy moving away from historical specificity to mere historical influence, I see more continuity between *Blood Meridian* and the Border Trilogy in their sustained engagement with national identities in the borderlands.
  7. "Official stories," explains Wald, "are narratives that surface in the rhetoric of nationalist movements and initiatives—legal, political, and literary" (2).
  8. Arguing against the "general assumption [. . .] that Native Americans were the victims of nationalist discourse pure and simple" (3), Walker has investigated the role Indians themselves played in either resisting or participating in the creation of a National Symbolic in the nineteenth century. "What has not been adequately recognized before," she suggests, "is that Native Americans also participated in this process, sometimes in the interests of revising notions of America to include the tribes themselves" (7).
  9. "*Blood Meridian* certainly cannot be read as suggesting some moral insight on the order of 'scalp hunting is wrong,'" Phillips argues. "Nor does it try to adumbrate a more sophisticated, more political version of that insight, something on the order of 'scalp hunting is imperialism by other means'" (449). However, the novel does show scalp hunting and violence to be a general condition of an imperialistic struggle for land, survival, and cultural domination.
  10. As Meier and Ribera explain, "Mexicans living in the ceded area had a year in which to decide whether they wanted to retain Mexican

citizenship or to become nationals of the United States. Those still living in the area at the end of the prescribed time who had not specifically declared their intention to remain Mexican citizens were presumed to desire US Nationality" (67).

11. "The Comanches had moved eastward into what would be north central Texas at least a hundred years before the Anglos began their settlements," Sepich points out (123). "They had come for the buffalo, and for the area's convenient access to trails southward into Mexico. [. . .] During the time in which *Blood Meridian* is set, the Comanches were following an established economic pattern based in part on the productivity of the Mexicans" (123–24).
12. Parrish and Spiller warn that "McCarthy invites us to view the aptly named White with smug, moral late-20th-century derision, but implies that our derision is comfortable only to the extent that men like White cleared the territory for our moral view" (469).
13. And just as he now rides down that Indian war path at sunset, we find him at the end of the novel again riding out again across the fields outside Iran, Texas, with its oil wells "like mechanical birds [. . .] welded up out of iron" (301), except that by then the forging of a "nation" will have given way to the despoiling of the land.
14. "Parataxis does not necessarily mean that there is no relation between the two terms put into juxtaposition," writes N. Katherine Hayles in a different context. "Rather the relation, unspecified except for proximity, is polysemous and unstable. [. . .] This aspect of parataxis makes it into a cultural seismograph, extraordinarily sensitive to rifts, tremors, and realignments in bodies of discourse, as well as in bodies constituted through discourse and cultural practices" (398).
15. I realize that the opposition "American" to "Mexican" is already misleading given the fact that "early Mexican nationalists wrote of themselves as *nosotros Americanos* and of their country as *nuestra America*. [. . .] In fact, people all over Spanish America thought of themselves as 'Americans,' since this term denoted precisely the shared fatality of extra-Spanish birth" (Anderson 62). A further irony in calling only United States citizens "Americans" is that the Declaration of Independence actually makes no mention of the nation as "America" or to the people as "Americans" (Anderson 193). And as Bercovitch reminds us, "The process by which the United States usurped America for itself, symbolically, is also the process by which liberalism established its political and economic dominance. This double process took effect between the Revolution and the Civil War. [. . .] The locus classicus is 1850, the year of *The Scarlet Letter*" (xxi). But 1848, not 1850, is the more obvious date when the United States "usurped America for itself," not "symbolically" but literally as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.
16. In picaresque novels, Anderson argues, "we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a socio-

logical landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. This picaresque tour d'horizon—hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negroes—is nonetheless not a tour du monde. The horizon is clearly bounded: it is that of colonial Mexico" (30). John Grady's travels are bounded by the horizon of mid-twentieth-century Mexico, but in crossing over the border and back again, and in switching freely from English to Spanish on either side, his journey suggests that drawing a border between the two countries tends to obscure the developing transAmerican imaginary of the borderlands.

17. Blevins and the other boys lose another marker of identity when they remove all their clothes before riding across the Rio Grande: "They crossed the river under a white quartermoon naked and pale and thin atop their horses [. . .] making for the alien shore like a party of marauders" (45).
18. For a detailed historical account of these events, particularly the involvement of the US in these and other events leading up to and following the Mexican Revolution, see Eisenhower.
19. Whereas Berlant implies that national identities are first imposed and then internalized, Scarry speculates that they are more deeply embedded in our bodies and minds than we usually assume:

The extent to which [. . .] the nation-state resides unnoticed in the intricate recesses of personhood, penetrates the deepest layers of consciousness, and manifests itself in the body itself is hard to assess. [. . .] Whether the body's loyalty to these political realms is more accurately identified as residing in one fragile gesture or in a thousand, it is likely to be deeply and permanently there, more permanently there, less easily shed, than those disembodied forms of patriotism that exist in verbal habits or in thoughts about one's national identity. (108–09)

20. Among those who have called for and developed a more capacious, comparative approach are Calderon and Saldívar, Kaplan and Pease, Moon and Davidson, and Lauter.
21. For a fascinating discussion of how we might learn to go "beyond traditional notions of identity," see Anzaldúa's article with that title in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
22. There is still a possibility of perpetuating American exceptionalism, according to Kowalewski, unless we fully acknowledge the ways in which national identities are always defined in relation to others: "American nationality can still be taken for granted as a monolithic and self-contained whole, no matter how diverse and conflicted, if it remains implicitly defined by its internal social relations, and not in political struggles with other cultures and nations, struggles which make America's conceptual and geographic borders fluid, contested, and historically changing" (15).

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